

Group of Eight Statement on Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, and Chancellor, do you think that the agreement, the statement that was issued today by the G-8 and Russia, will do anything to hasten the end to the conflict?

Chancellor Schroeder. I can only repeat and emphasize what the President of the United States of America has just said. I consider it as truly substantial progress which has been made there. There has been open talk about the presence and the necessity for the presence of international troops there, and I think things will continue along that way.

I would also very much like to emphasize the fact that I agree that there is no reason whatsoever to now think about a change in the NATO strategy now that the strategy does seem to work, and I'm talking about military as well as political initiatives undertaken therein.

President Clinton. Let me just say very briefly, I agree with what the Chancellor has said. I do believe it's an advance because you have to see the G-8 resolution here, the statement, in the context of Mr. Chernomyrdin's efforts. I mean, here is a man that served as Premier of Russia twice; very highly regarded, I think, by all of us who have ever dealt with him on all sides of this issue. And this statement, plus his ongoing effort, I think you have to read this as a move forward and increasing the likelihood that there will ultimately be a resolution of this that will actually work.

Thank you.

NOTE: Chancellor Schroeder spoke at 5:45 p.m. in the Office of the Chancellor at the Chancellery. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski of Macedonia. In President Clinton's remarks, he referred to Special Envoy and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of Russia. The President also referred to the European Union (EU). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Houston, Texas

May 7, 1999

Thank you very much, Ken. I want to thank you for so many things, but particularly today for the work you have done on this. And I thank Joe Andrew for being willing to leave Indiana, a State no one thought could become a Democratic State, that just elected a new Democratic Governor and elected Senator Evan Bayh overwhelmingly, thanks in no small measure to his leadership there. And I look forward to many years of his leadership for the DNC.

I'd like to thank Molly Beth Malcolm for being here and Steve Zimmerman for providing us this modest little room to have lunch in. [Laughter] Someone told me that Napoleon was once in this room, but not in Texas—[laughter]—and Frederick the Great, and all kinds of other people. I don't know if any of them were Democrats, but we are. We may have tripled the number of Democrats who have ever been in this room in the last 300 years, just today at lunch. [Laughter] But I am delighted to be here, and I thank all of you for coming.

I want to talk a little today—I know several of you said that I looked tired, and I don't know whether it's just because I'm not young anymore or because I just got back from 2 days meeting with our troops and with refugees from Kosovo in Germany. But this is a rather unusual moment for our country, I think, because things are in some ways the best of times. We just saw today, again last month unemployment rate was 4.3 percent. We had another 234,000 jobs; we're up to 18,400,000 now in the life of this administration. The welfare rolls have been cut nearly in half. We've got a 30-year low in the crime rate. The teen pregnancy rate is going down. Basically, the social indicators are good. Many of the indicators relating to drug use are moving in the right direction.

And I want to say a special word of thanks, by the way—I think he—no, he didn't

leave—to Mayor Brown, who in his previous incarnation was a member of our Cabinet and led our Nation's efforts to keep our children away from drugs. And I was elated when he was elected mayor, and I hope you'll keep him here for a good long time, because I think he'll do a great job for you. And thank you, Mayor, for being here today.

Anyway, you know, we have to feel good about these things. And I do, and I feel grateful. But all of us are sobered and saddened by three events of the recent days. And I would like to mention—although they seem entirely disparate—one is the terrible tornadoes that have claimed record numbers of lives in Oklahoma and Kansas and related storms here in Texas and over in Tennessee; the second, obviously, is the heartbreaking tragedy in Littleton, Colorado—I know we were all glad to see the children go back to school this week; and the third is the conflict in Kosovo. And I would like to try, if I could, today—it's not exactly your typical party-stump speech at a fundraising luncheon—but just ask you to think with me about how we're—what lessons we should learn from those three events and how it relates to what we're trying to do in our administration and with our party.

And I'd like to go back just for a moment to 1992 and late 1991, when I made the decision to seek the Presidency. I was in my fifth term as Governor. I was having a wonderful time. Our daughter was doing well in school and with her friends. And Hillary and I were having more fun with our friends because I was about to get the hang of being Governor, having done it for 10 or 11 years. And I really didn't want to do what I did in 1992—plus, it seemed like a fool's errand; President Bush was at, like, 75 percent approval in the polls when I made the decision to run. And I knew I was a relatively young person, and I could wait, and that was my kind of personal inclination.

But I was profoundly disturbed by two things: first, by the objective conditions in the United States. There were—unemployment was high; inequality was increasing; wages hadn't increased in real terms in 20 years; and all the social indicators were going in the wrong direction.

But the second thing that bothered me was that the debate in Washington seemed so divorced from the world, on the street in Arkansas where I lived and from the larger world beyond the borders of the United States, that it seemed to me that the parties were caught in a gridlock, labeling each other and fighting over turf in Washington that did not deal with what I thought were the two great challenges of our age: One was preparing for the 21st century by trying to take advantage of all the economic changes and the technology and globalization that was going on in a way that enabled people to build stronger families and stronger communities and left no one behind; and the second was, to find a way to deal with the dizzying array of differences in our own society in a way that respected those differences but pulled us closer together. And I didn't see much coming out that would do that.

And it seemed to me that there was a way that you could actually strengthen the economy, for example, and improve the environment. There was a way to reward entrepreneurs and still reach out to people who were being left behind and let them go along for the ride in this new economy. There should be a way to reduce the deficit and still increase investment and education and health care. There should be a way to help people succeed at home as parents and succeed at work. There should be a way that we could glorify the individual, as we always have in America, and recognize that fundamentally we'll all do better if we're one community.

And that's basically what the campaign in '92 was all about, and those words that I said, that I wanted a society that had opportunity for all and responsibility from all and a community of all Americans. And that's why I'm here today. You know, I'm not running for office, and some of the people out on the street are apparently elated about it. [*Laughter*] But that's the American way. I'm not running for office. I'm here because, while I am grateful for the role I have been able to play as President, in the 18 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years and having 90 percent of our kids immunized against serious diseases for the

first time in history, opening the doors of college to all Americans with the tax credits and the improved student loan program and the scholarship programs, and all the other things we've done—the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; we've set aside more land to be protected than any administration in history, except those of the two Roosevelts—I am grateful for all of that.

But this is not a matter of personality. We had ideas that we turned into policies. We changed the role of Government. We have a smaller Government. There are fewer people working for the Federal Government now than in any time since John Kennedy was President. And yet, it's more active. We focus less on telling people what to do and more on giving people the tools to solve their own problems and creating the conditions in which Americans could thrive in the world. And the ideas matter. And the values, the principles of opportunity and responsibility and community matter. And the Democratic Party, therefore, matters.

These ideas have benefited every people in every State. They have benefited Republicans and independents as much as they have benefited Democrats. They are capable of unifying the country at a time when so many continue to seek to divide it. And they also give us a clue about what we should do.

We've still got big challenges out there. It would be a big mistake for us not to deal with the challenges of Social Security and saving Medicare and to do it in a way that will enable us now to reduce the debt of this country over the next 15 years to its lowest point since before World War II. Did you ever think you'd hear anybody stand up and talk about doing that?

It would be a great mistake for us not to continue to push for education reform, to put more teachers in the classroom with modern facilities, to finish the job of hooking all our classrooms up to the Internet, to end the practice, nationwide, of social promotion, but not to label the kids failures, to give them the after-school programs and the summer school programs they need to have higher standards around the country. It would be a mistake for us not to continue to do this just because times are good here. It would also be a mistake for us not to continue to

try to give opportunity to people who still don't have it. There are still places in Texas, with all the economy booming, that haven't felt this recovery.

Just a few days from now the Vice President is going down to south Texas to have our annual empowerment zone conference. And I'm very proud of the fact that one of the things that we have worked hard to do in the last 6 years is to leave no one behind, to give tax incentives and other investments to poor communities to try to induce people to start businesses there and put people to work there. And I'm very proud of the fact that one of the major initiatives before the Congress this year, my so-called new markets initiative, would give people loan guarantees and tax credits to invest in the poor neighborhoods of America and urban and rural areas—like they can get today to invest in poor neighbors overseas.

I think we ought to give people the same incentives to invest in Americans who don't have jobs and opportunity that we give them to invest elsewhere. I don't want to take the others away. I just want our folks to have the same chance.

So there's a lot to do. And it would be a mistake, just because of our prosperity or because people are already talking about the next election, to overlook the fact that we still have a lot of time between now and January of 2001, and to put a great country in idle is a great mistake.

The second thing I'd like to say is I think it is a mistake to forget about our continuing obligations in the face of the problems of the moment. But I think there are lessons in each of these three things that I mentioned that we're all very much preoccupied about now.

What is the lesson of the tornadoes? This maybe belongs more in a sermon on Sunday than a political speech, but the lesson is, no matter how well America does, a little humility is always in order. We are not in full control. And we have to be sensitive about this, especially here in this part of the country. We have to do more to try to prepare ourselves for these storms, and we have to do more to try to minimize their impact when they occur.

The Governor of Oklahoma said a couple of days ago when I called him after the tornado that—we were talking about how Oklahoma and east Texas and Arkansas are at the beginning of basically the tornado belt in America—and he said, “You know, the more growth we have, the more expansion of our communities, the more construction we’re going to have in these alleys where tornadoes often hit.” And we began to talk about that, about construction and safety and prevention.

I say that to point out that there are certain constants that we have to deal with in our society that call on us to be humble, call on us to be prepared and remember we’re not in total control.

Now, the second thing I’d like to say about Littleton is that the lesson here is that no matter how prosperous we are economically—and this was terrible for that community; I’ve talked to school officials and local officials there—we have to understand that there are forces at work in our society that call on us to make an extra effort to protect our children from violence.

I think it is important not to overly politicize this in the sense of fingerpointing. I have said before, and I will say again, I think that instead of everyone saying, “Whose responsibility is that? Whose fault is this?”—I mean, instead of saying whose fault this is, we should say, “What can I do to take responsibility for it? What can I do to change it? What can I do to make it better?”

Like you, I don’t know any more about what happened there than what I can read about it. But I have read voraciously. I have watched the television programs. I have listened to the townhall meetings and the other interviews that people up there have done. And you may know that Hillary and the Vice President and Tipper and I are going to have a big meeting at the White House on the 10th, next Monday. We’re going to bring in people to talk about every aspect of this, including some people who have been very active in antiviolence initiatives around the country.

But I would just like to say—I ask you to think about Littleton in the following ways. Number one, no society has any job more important than raising its children well. It

is the number one job of every society. And raising our children well depends upon doing our jobs as parents but also recognizing, as Hillary said years ago, it does take a village, and we need to look at the village and see what the village is like now.

And the following things occur to me, and I don’t want to prejudge what we will do on Monday, but I think we need to recognize that without regard to family income, the speed and pressure of modern life increases the chances that children will become isolated and that vulnerable children, therefore, will be more likely to drift into something that’s really bad for them. At any given moment in time there will always be children who are vulnerable to problems.

But if you just think about the speed and pressure and sheer movement of modern life, the speed with which people move around and the hassles that are associated with that, and the speed with which images and news and information of all kinds—positive, negative—is crammed into our lives, I think that a lot of what we have to deal with here is giving our children some breaks, some protections, and our families some breaks and protections about that.

The second thing I think is important is that we need to honestly try to challenge the families of this country not to give up on communicating with our kids when they start to drift away from them naturally and move into independence. It’s still important to maintain some kind of knowledge of what’s going on in there.

The third thing I’d like to tell you is I think that there are things schools can do which will at least minimize youth violence, over and above zero tolerance for guns and other things. I visited a very impressive school in Virginia the other day, in Alexandria, that has a phenomenally diverse student body. They have a very active peer mediation group where the kids try to solve each other’s problems. They have comprehensive counseling services. They have access to mental health services for kids who need it.

And I think it’s very important—Tipper Gore is going to have the White House Conference on Mental Health in Washington in the next few days, and she had a very courageous article in *USA Today*, today. If you

haven't read it, I urge you to read it. I was really proud of her, talking about the whole issue and how it affected her life and her family's. I think that's very important.

I'll tell you something else this school had; this school had a 1-800 hotline so that if the children suspected that some other students in school were maybe going to do something destructive or wrong, they could call the hotline and have certainty that the lead would be followed up on but that they wouldn't be outed as somebody who was talking about their classmates.

So I think we have to continue to work with the schools, as the Secretary of Education and the Attorney General have done. I think that there are challenges for those who influence our culture, including the entertainment community. When we trivialize or brutalize relationships or trivialize violence or, particularly in the intimacy of the Internet and the video games, run the risk that kids who are already isolated create a whole alternative reality that at the same time desensitizes them to violence, I think that's a problem.

And I also believe, finally, that there ought to be some more laws that will minimize the chances that the kinds of weapons those kids had will get into the hands of children who will do bad things with them. And I hope we can avoid yet another big fight in Washington between the NRA and others. This should not be the culture war we have going on. It makes common sense, it seems to me, to reinstitute the waiting period of the Brady bill, along with the insta-check. It ought to apply to people that buy explosives as well as people who buy handguns.

We ought to close the loopholes in the assault weapons ban law. We have an assault weapons ban, but it's got a couple of loopholes in it big enough to drive a truck through. We don't need—if the law is a good law, then we ought to make it work. We ought to do background checks at gun shows. I've been to gun shows in rural America. I know a lot of people that run them think this is going to be a terrible headache. It's not. The technology is there. We can fix it, so we can do it.

But the main thing I want to say is, I do not believe there is any one answer here. I

believe there is a responsibility in the entertainment community. I think there's a responsibility in the Internet community. I think there's a responsibility for the gun manufacturers and law enforcement. I think there is a responsibility in the schools. I think there is a responsibility with the parents. I think a lot of us have something to do.

But what I would like you to think about here, instead of being despondent about the magnitude of the problem, is, first of all, look at the courage and character of the overwhelming majority of the people in Littleton that we have seen manifest in so many different ways under such adversity.

And secondly, look at the example that Americans are capable of solving their social problems by grassroots movements. That's really why the teen pregnancy rate is dropping, because there's a grassroots effort, a comprehensive effort that is sweeping the whole country. That's why drunk driving went down—Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Students Against Drunk Driving.

So there is no magic bullet here, and the most important thing is having a magic attitude of not taking any solution off the table because it would require you to do something, but not falling into the easy trap of pointing the finger at someone else. But the lesson here is that if we want to be a strong and great nation, we must continue to deal with the problems, and they're not all economic problems. And there is nothing more important than the quality of our children's childhood.

Now, let me close with Kosovo. There are some people who may not understand why we would be so concerned about what happens in a small place a long way away, where hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people have been uprooted, had their homes burned, the records of their very existence burned, their religious and cultural sites destroyed, sometimes people literally wrapped in bundles and burned alive, lots of children raped, solely because of their ethnic and religious background. And it is a reprise of what happened just a few years ago in Bosnia.

Why should we care about it? First all of, because it violates our most fundamental values. And if we have the capacity to stop something like that, we ought to.

Secondly, because we have learned the hard way that people, when they behave that way, think that that behavior—if they get away with it, they think it's rewarded, and other people will follow their lead. And all over the world today, at the end of the cold war, when communism is gone as a competing ideology, if there is nothing positive to organize people and pull them together, then one of the things that is most likely to pull them apart are racial, ethnic, and religious differences, used to demonize other people, almost exclusively by people who don't really believe it as much as they are trying to mobilize people to get political power or wealth or both.

Now, we fought two wars in Europe in the century that's about to end. We want Europe to be united, to be free, to be democratic, to be at peace. If they are, they'll be our friends. They'll be our partners. They'll be better trading partners. They'll also help us solve problems in other parts of the world. There are all kinds of practical reasons we should do this. There are all kinds of practical reasons.

But when you get right down to it, if we are going to say we are grateful that America has emerged from the cold war as the world's only superpower, if we're going to be grateful for the good fortune we have enjoyed in the last 6 years, we have to be willing to spend a small percentage of our good fortune and a significant percentage of our credibility to be good allies with our European friends who asked us to come and help, and do this.

I also believe in a world where religious differences have bedeviled the Middle East and Northern Ireland and so many other places, it speaks volumes that the United States and our European friends and Canada are willing to stand up for people who are overwhelmingly of the Muslim faith, and say, they have rights, too; they are people, too; they are children of God, too; and they deserve the right to have their life, to go home, to be safe, to have the autonomy that they deserve. And that's what we're fighting for in Kosovo.

If you think about—there's one little baby here, or was here a few minutes ago—you imagine that the world this baby is going to live in when she gets out of college and goes

into the world. Do you want it to be a world where, frankly, more and more people have a lot of the economic prosperity we've enjoyed? I do, because that means we'll do even better if we have more partners who are doing better, which is characterized by people knowing each other across national lines, sharing economic opportunity, sharing educational opportunity, working together in common cause to deal with the continuing challenges of the world. Or do we want it to be a world where we feel like we're under siege all the time because everywhere people are falling victim to their most primitive impulses, that they're using modern technology and modern computers to figure out how to get modern weapons to kill somebody because of some ancient hatred? I don't think it's a close question.

And one of the things that I have learned as President is that you cannot draw an easy dividing line between what is a domestic issue and a foreign issue in a world that is getting smaller and smaller and smaller. You can't just do that. You can't say, "Well, it's great that international trade helps most of us," and forget about those that are not helped by trade. You have to give them the education, the skills, the training, the opportunity so that no one will be left behind. That's a domestic and a foreign issue. And believe me, this is, too.

The greatest thing this country has got going for it today is that we have all different kinds of people that all have their chances. But we have to stand against hatred and for harmony. We have to say, "Whatever our differences, our fundamental common humanity is more important than anything else."

I was reading coming down here today that here in the legislature, Texas is debating this hate crimes law, named after James Byrd. You know, for me as a white southerner, the thought that a man could be murdered because of his race in 1999 is heartbreaking. But it is a sober reminder that human nature may improve, but we'll always have problems. And it is the country's organization, the country's dominant values, the country's leadership, the country's direction that matters.

I hope that law will pass and become law here. I hope that Texas will say, "We don't

want people to be hurt because of their race, because they're gay, because of whatever. And when people are hurt in that way, we stand against it."

But in a larger sense, I hope that we will become a more effectively caring society. I hope we'll find some ways to put on the brakes when the speed's too fast for our children's childhood, and they're hurtling toward isolation in a destructive way.

And I think we can do that and still get all the benefits of this modern world that's opened up to us. But it will depend upon the right ideas and the right values. It is not dependent upon any one person.

I am so grateful that I have been the instrument, as President, of some of the good things that have happened in America. I am more grateful than you know. But what matters is that we have the right values and the right ideas, and when something works, we do not abandon it; we stick with it.

That's why I'm here. That's why I hope you will continue to support our party. Because what we have stood for has made a lot of difference, and it will make more difference in the future if you and I do our part.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in the Le Grand Salon de la Comtesse at La Colombe d'Or restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to F. Kenneth Bailey, Jr., event chair, and Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee; Molly Beth Malcolm, State Democratic chair; Gov. Frank O'Bannon of Indiana; Gov. Frank Keating of Oklahoma; Mayor Lee Patrick Brown of Houston, TX; and Stephen Zimmerman, owner, La Colombe d'Or restaurant.

Remarks on Arrival at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Austin, Texas

May 7, 1999

Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. I want you to know, folks, I spent some of the best days of my life in Austin, Texas. And when Lloyd went up to make his remarks, I looked at the mayor and I said, being mayor of Austin may be the best elected job in the United States. And he didn't dispute me.

I also want to thank Lloyd Doggett for his leadership on this and so many other projects. We've been friends for many, many years. I was elated when he was elected to the Congress, and I can tell you he does a terrific job for all the constituents of this district in Washington, DC.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very, very sorry I had to miss the dedication. You know why. The events in Littleton, Colorado, compelled me to cancel. I do want to tell you that on Monday Hillary and Al and Tipper Gore and I are going to have a very distinguished array of people from all over the country to meet in Washington to organize a national campaign against violence involving our children. And I know it will have the support of every person here.

But I want to ask you to think a little bit about the significance of this airport not only in terms of what it means to all of you but in terms of what it means to the future of America and how we ought to do all of our business. Six years ago, when your air base was closed, you saw that it did not have to be an economic setback. In fact, it could be an enormous opportunity. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport today is a testament to your unwavering commitment and vision.

For years, this airport had the following motto: Bergstrom Air Force Base: Global Power for America. Today this airport is still a symbol of global power for America. It's a different kind of power. Where military aircraft essential to our victory in the cold war once landed here, now boxes of software take off for markets around the world, fueling our success in the new global economy. Where once pilots flew reconnaissance missions to survey cold war enemies, now they fly planes that ferry high-tech visionaries between Silicon Valley and these "Silicon Hills."

This airport will be your gateway to prosperity in the 21st century. And I especially appreciate something that's already been mentioned, that you pay tribute to some of Texas' finest citizens. I hope every visitor will be inspired by Captain Bergstrom's courage and sacrifice, by my good friend Jake Pickle's life of service and compassion, by President Johnson's bold vision and commitment to progress for all Americans together, and by